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SC Was that the only time you worked for any part of the Forest Service?

OO That was my first assignment as I remember, with the Forest Service. I worked for the Bureau of Entomology at Yosemite National Park prior to that in 1946. Various other jobs around the country, but those were my first federal jobs, yeah.

SC How did you get involved with smokejumping?

OO It was probably through, well not probably, I know. It was through a friend at college who had...

SC What was his name?

OO Bill Kickbush was one... at Michigan State. Bill Kickbush was one friend, and I'm not sure if it was he who influenced me or not. But another one I think was Dwight Patton. I hope I've got that person correct, it's been a long time. He was a classmate of mine and he had jumped in '48 or '49 as I recall. We had talked about it, and I was interested and I needed a job for the summer, and it looked like a good way to spend the summer.

SC What were you taking in college?

OO I was taking Forestry.

SC Oh, you were involved with forestry. What was it about smokejumping that appealed to you?

OO [laughs] Oh, god. I think the adventure and the idea of it. I've always been a little afraid of heights ever since then and probably before. No, I think it was the adventure. You know a lot of the young bucks are... adventurous enough to try something at least once, and I really enjoyed it, I really did.

SC Were the rest of the people involved in your outfit college students, or what was the make-up?

OO Yes, most of them were college students. I remember Willie Unsold who was one of the first men on Everest was in my group. And I knew Willie quite well when we were jumping together and I'd met him a couple of times since. There were a couple of local loggers from the Cave Junction area, at the time, two brothers as I remember. But I don't remember their names. Most of the fellows were Army veterans, were Service veterans from WWII. Of course, being 1950 that would put those fellows in that age bracket. In the 20 to 25 year old bracket. But I would say most of them.

SC Were they forestry majors?
No, not... very many of them were forestry. There was one studying law, gosh there were other disciplines involved. But I would say of the college graduates, remembering back there were probably very few, not over three or four of my outfit, that were ... forestry or related.

SC Do you think, or what's your opinion of why they were jumping?

I think probably the same reason I was. There's a certain amount of macho ego thing, and those, at that age too, you want to do something nobody else has done, or very few people. And hey, in those days, there were very few people who had jumped smoke. Now, after our reunion the the other day, you look around and the woods [laughs] is full of them. But in those days, it was very few people. So I was one of the very few for a long time. Although I only jumped one year, I was graduated the next year and took a permanent job with a company. That was one of the years that will, or one of the summer jobs that I had that will stay with me the rest of my life. As evidenced by the fact that we did go to the smokejumper reunion last week. But I think the fellows that were there, some of them had jumping experience in the Army. But at that time it was not... it was not even desirable to have jump experience in the Army. However, they would have liked it had they been there. The big thing, as it is today, is their fire fighting capabilities, knowledge of capabilities. And I had done some of that before.

SC You did do some fire fighting before?

Yeah, with Yosemite National Park and several other places, mostly on a local basis.

SC So you did have some fire fighting experience?

Yeah, yeah.

SC Do you remember your training for a smokejumper?

Yeah, quite well.

SC Could you tell me about it?

I remember it was some... do a couple of laps around the airfield in the morning before breakfast, as I recall. You come in and have breakfast. Then some loosening up exercises, some calisthenics, as I remember. Our field was about three of four miles from Cave Junction, the town itself. And yet our training site was downtown in Cave Junction, at the ranger station. It was not out in the base at all. It was down there in town. I remember a grove of Douglas Fir that it was in, man, it was a long ways to the top of that, [laughs] clear up to the first limb. We had to rig up amongst the trees where we would climb and our letdowns were stretched between two trees, you know, our letdowns, and stuff like that. Of course our torture rack had to
be out in the sun, there wasn't any other place for it. That was the one we bent over backwards for, you know.

SC So you felt it was pretty rigorous training?

OO Oh, I sure did, you bet, oh yeah. And we all as I recall, you hear a lot of griping and everything about it. But it was not malicious, it was, you know, good natured. [laughs] About the torture rack and kind of kid everybody along, you know, and the letdowns. I think the toughest job that I had we had to climb those Doug Fir, and they were five feet in diameter, breast high, at the ground, five feet let's say. But you had to climb up... a long ways. But I remember, I can't remember how far it was. But it seems to me it was up around the first limbs, we had a little bell up there we had to ring, and it took me several attempts to get far enough off the grounds that my knees would quit shaking. It was very rigorous as far as I was concerned, especially when you were somewhat excited with it. I remember that was my toughest job. We had to learn to climb, of course, in order to get our chutes out and everything. And with our spurs and stuff and that old Doug Fir bark. You know you had to had those long bark spikes on your boots, you know, on the climbing irons and they were made especially for climbing the thick barked Doug Fir and Sugar Pine that were in that country.

SC How long did this training take?

OO Oh, I don't know, it seemed like forever. I suppose before we jumped the first time it was at least two weeks, maybe three, before we made our first practice jumps.

SC Do you remember you first practice jump?

OO No, but I remember about my third one, [laughs]. The first two or three, you're kind of... you're thinking about everything that has been hammered into your skull. But long about the third or fourth one you have other things to think about. "What the Hell am I doing here?",[laughs]. I don't really recall any one in particular. Except I remember a tough landing I made one time. We were landing in a pasture, a cow pasture, and the cow chips got kind of hard, you know, and baked in the sun. I broke a toe on one of them. [laughs] That was about my fifth or sixth jump or something. So I was off about a week or so before I could jump again. Till we quit limping, that was the big thing, it didn't matter whether the toe was healed or not, as long as you could quit limping [laughs] you were in for another jump.

SC Do you remember your first fire jump?

OO Oh, yeah, you bet.

SC Do you remember where that was?

OO On the Trinity Alps and I think it was called the Yellowjacket Fire. It was in northern California and I think it
was in or around the Yellowjacket Ridge, that seems familiar to me. In those days it was one long ways in there. I suspect there is a road into there now. It was seven or eight miles in off the road and we had, there was some real big timber in there. And we jumped just before dark, and I was the last man out. And I tell you it was getting pretty dark. I jumped from, we didn't want to go back up and get our altitude, so I jumped from somewhat less than a thousand feet. And, I landed in a madrona, or some type of a hardwood tree... as I recall, and hung up only about three feet off the ground. So I thought I'll just drop from here, rather than make a letdown from my rope as we had been trained, you know.

I kicked my release box, but I didn't unbutton my Bennet strap which was a strap that ran across the breast. Under that strap you had two canvass bags that you packed all your gear in, you see. Well, those things were road up under my chin [laughs], partially cut my wind off so I couldn't even holler for help. Here I was three feet off the ground, of course. I managed to get a handful of shroud lines pull 'em down and hold 'em in my teeth so I could unbutton that Bennet strap, it had a little spring catch in it. I dropped free without having to holler for help, because that was kind of [laughs]. The rest of the fellows would kind of give you a bad time about that.

But then I recall, we had, they dropped four fire packs, or fire packs for four people. Anyway, that was all there was on the fire. A fire pack, or a chute loaded with two fire packs hung up in the biggest sugar pine in the Trinity Alps. And we didn't have a saw to go through it, you know, no way. You couldn't even saw it down, and you couldn't get a climbing rope around it. You know, they give you an eighteen foot climbing rope you know and good grief, it lacks three or four feet of going around that sugar pine. So we were down to four tools, which was a shovel and a pulaski for each man and rations and stuff for two men instead of four, and water.

So we were on that fire two days. It was about a six, eight, ten, acre fire. It wasn't all that big but we were on it a couple of days. We only had sleeping bags for two, and rations for two, and water for two. Well, water was the big item and we were way up in the air from water. There wasn't even water in the first draw, you know, down the hill. And so, we sent a scout out on the second day to find some water. He came back empty with no water. So we, you know, we, that was kind of a tough little show. And we left there, we got word that ground troops were coming in and we left there sometime in the afternoon as I recall, and started to hike out, with our fire packs. I mean our chute bags and everything you know. We only had pack boards for two people so I was elected to pack mine out just by holding it on my shoulders.

So I remember that one very well. We finally got to, after maybe a couple hours of travel, we got to a stream. A live stream and we kind of soaked up the water, you know. [laughs]. It was uh, that was a good sight, you know to see water like that. What we did, we bathed some, and we drank our fill. We rested for a while, and we bathed some. And then we walked in. It wasn't very far from there into, they had located a fire camp at the end of
an old mining road. When we got there, they were just unloading some stuff and they had a whole roast pork. I'll remember that a long time, [laughs]. A great big ol', [laughs] And that was what we had for meat. Sandwiches, they had bread, and we made sandwiches. Gosh, I think the four of us must have eaten that whole big roast, and juice.

There was only four or five guys that had gotten in there with a jeep and had started that fire camp. And then we stuck around there, until, I don't recall if we stayed overnight or anything. We just stuck around there until they got another jeep in to us. Then we drove out to Weaverville, California and we met the Forest Supervisor there. I wish I could remember his name, but I can't. He took us, all four of us out to dinner, to a fried chicken place. It was about midnight as I recall, but he opened them up for us. He called them and opened them up. So we all ordered double chicken dinners as I recall [laughs]. And slept at a bunk house and flew back the next day. And that was the one an only fire jump that I made. Although I got lots of fire duty out there that summer, that was the only fire jump that I made.

SC What was your fire duty?

00 Moore's Mill, is one name I recall. Moore's Mill fire, and it was a, gee whiz, it was more than a thousand acres. And it just took off one after noon, and burned the mill down and took off up in the brush. That was one. But maybe two or three others.

SC Was your outfit just not called up to do fire jumps.

00 It was a pretty slow year, as I recall. Matter of fact just the other day I was looking up the records of fire jumps for that period, you know. The number of fires, number of jumps I guess, that was made for jumpers in the nation. I think they had been averaging two thousand five hundred, three thousands jumps a year, even in those days. And that year that I jumped, in 1950 it dropped down to fourteen hundred. So there wasn't very many fires that year. However we did have some, what we consider today as being large fires. Thousand acre fires that took off, local, that we drove to.

SC So your smokejumping unit was used as ground troops.

00 Yeah a lot of them. They'd send a whole crew in and just leave enough in there to man the next one or two sticks. Which was, we usually jumped or three or four man stick, that's all. In that Noorduyn, that's the one that we jumped in. That Noorduyn Norseman... and there's a picture of it in that.

SC What other projects did you do out in the woods?

00 Ah, helped build a chute loft there. We just started to build that base up out there in the airfield. So I was doing some construction work,. And worked in a loft, and then...
worked with a timber staff man, or the timber layout man. I won't say the timber staff. We were doing some corner searches, some layout work up in the... timber by Cave Junction. I worked there... and gee I don't recall.

SC Were you disappointed that you only got one fire jump?

00 Yeah, I was. Oh absolutely, sure. I was happy to have gotten that because I think there was some guys who didn't get a fire jump at all. I don't recall how many jumps exactly that I made. But there was seven practice, and I think we had, I had the one fire jump and then it was so long getting that that I did jump one other time. So I think, totally all I had was nine jumps. That kind of sticks in my mind.

SC Did you like jumping out of airplanes?

00 Yeah, just for the fun of it. I can't say it wasn't anything I wouldn't want to do today, but, you know, because of my age. Matter of fact, if I had a little more beer one day at the Huckleberry Festival, [laughs] why in Noxon or at, at Trout Creek, Montana, I probably would have jumped again, with one of my buddies over there, [laughs]. My wife was kind of raising hell, she said, 'Oh no you don't'. But I think most of us are that way. We did like it or we wouldn't have been there. I don't know anybody that washed out because they didn't like it or that he didn't jump or anything.

SC What did wash them out?

00 There may have been. As I recall, injuries, was the only thing I recall, injuries. I know there was a fellow called Hal Norton, and Hal Norton suffered back injuries. And a fellow by the name of Corsett. He was that lawyer that I was telling you about, studying law. He suffered a, I think it was a broken ankle in a fire jump. But he was one of the older fellows that had jumped for more than one year. There were several of us, more than half of us were one year jumpers, as I recall, or about half or something. In those days you didn't jump, very few of us jumped more than one or two years at the most. Now you know, gee, I know one guy over there in Missoula who has been jumping seventeen years. A friend of my wife, he's a school teacher, jumps in the summer.

SC What was his name?

00 Wolf. That's over here, he's here in Missoula.

SC What did your family think of your going off and jumping?

00 [Laughs] Oh, I don't think anybody was particularly concerned, at least my mother didn't, you know. Oh good god, jump out of airplanes are you crazy? That kind of deal. No, I think... nobody ever tried to talk me out of it, that's for sure.
SC  What about your friends?

OO  I was going with my wife at the time, you know. I guess the attitude in those days was well, he's working for the country, the good of the country. Patriotism was much higher, intense than it is today. And if you worked for the government or you worked for the Forest Service or the Army, or whatever you did in government work. There's a hell of a lack of respect today in comparison to what there was in those days. So you were respected by your friends for doing that.

SC  So it was seen as patriotic?

OO  Yeah, yes. I believe that was a lot of it, too. That was a lot of it, with those of us that did jump in those day, it was patriotic, yeah.

SC  Did you feel maybe among your male friends in college, that maybe there was a certain amount of envy?

OO  Oh sure, yeah. Cause like I said, you know, now smokejumpers or ex-smokejumpers, there are a lot of them around. But in those days there weren't very many of us. Out of my class, or those people that I knew, whether they were my class, I only knew two others. That's... maybe out of five hundred forestry students total, that was all I knew. Although there may have been more. Yes, I think there was.

But in those days it didn't seem as though it was so much trouble getting a summer job, as it is today, you know. So you kind of had your pick. As a matter of fact I was accepted by Missoula, McCall, I don't think it was McCall in those days. I think it was at Payette, that jumper base. But I was accepted at three places and I picked Cave Junction.

SC  Why?

OO  I don't know. Maybe I'd get more jumps there. Because it was a small base, there was I think it was only seventeen jumpers and three crew leaders. I thought I'd probably get more jumps there. Actually, I got probably less, but it doesn't make any difference.

SC  Your crew leaders, were they regular Forest Service people?

OO  I don't think so, as I recall, they had GS same as we did. But I think they were part time... folks. I recall they did come on early, like in May or something like that. I don't ever recall going out of the region, to go to New Mexico, like we do now. To wherever the fire danger is the hottest, you know. They transfer them around and all. We stayed right there. As I recall that's the way they worked it those days. But they put those fellows on early and kept them late, into September, later... than a regular jumper.

SC  What about the pilots, do you remember any of the pilots?
All I remember is that his name was Ed, and that was all I can remember about him. He was a Forest Service pilot, and I remember hearing him talk about having to fly the Regional Forester some place or something like that, so he was a regional pilot. But I don't remember what his name was. I'd probably recognize him if I saw him.

SC When you were not doing projects or ground troops for jumping, what were you doing on your off time?

OO Off time? You mean, oh, OK, you mean on our own time. Oh, I'd go and do a little fishing in the river. We were right there on the Illinois River. We'd go down the river swimming, you know on our days off. Of course, we didn't drink any beer, [laughs]. The Oregon caves were close and we went up there a couple times. Oh, some of the fellow had motorcycles. I remember Willie Edsel, every time you see him he'd have a climbing rope and his climbing gear on him and he was climbing mountains around there, someplace. But that wasn't really my bag. [laughs]. I remember my folks lived in California and they came up one weekend. I don't recall. Lot of times, well if the fire danger got pretty warm why we were... asked to stick around. But in those days they didn't pay you to stick around. If you wanted to go to a fire, stick around, so we did.

[Interruption, the phone rings and tape is turned off.]

So it was, it was a very interesting summer. I left sometime around the first of September and got back with time enough to get back to school. The next year I was a senior, and... I... as soon as I got out of school I got married so I just never went back. I had a permanent job, not with the government but with a private company.

SC You said you would have like to maybe.

OO Yeah, I think if I had heard about that outfit a little earlier, and got to thinking about it. I would have like to have more jump experience, maybe two or three summers. Because it was pretty good money, in comparison to what we were making elsewhere in those days, it was good money.

SC But you saw it as more than just a summer job.

OO Oh, yeah, you bet, yeah, yeah.

SC Do you think the other men in your outfit thought of it that way, too?

OO I know some of them did. I know probably most of them did. There was a lot of esprit de corps... in that outfit.

SC Why do you think that was?

OO Oh, for some of the same reasons. A lot of them were veterans from World War II, or immediately after World War II and they had been in. And, oh I think, there was more esprit de
corps, in whatever we did. Whether you were working for the
government or a company or whatever in those days. I don't know
why that is, but I expect there was a different... oh a different
attitude... with your working and so on, in those days, I think.

A lot of the things they are calling abuses today, you know,
were never, that was just a part of the job. Went with the job,
you know. You traveled on your own time. You worked long hours.
Good grief, we would work thirty, forty hours straight without
a let up. And a lot of time without any food or any support at
all, in those days. We were paid, as far as I can remember. I
don't think I have ever worked, we never had to work for
nothing, or anything. Today with our OSHA and our laws and our
regulations in personnel management and so on, why there are a
lot of things we don't do today that we did in the old days. And
I never thought anything about it.

SC I was going to ask you, the men that you were with in your
season of fire fighting, if it had not been for being in the
Forest Service, being smokejumpers, would you have been friends,
possibly, socially, with those men?

OO Yeah, we were the same kind of people I suppose. Had I
known those people in college or had met them in a work
environment or whatever, yes, we probably would have been. We
were the same kind of people.

SC What kind of people?

OO Adventurous, I would think that would be, you know, we
weren't hell raisers. We'd go to town and have a few beers. But
we never in any kind of shape we couldn't jump, you know. There
was a lot of friendship and... although after we broke up I never
really corresponded with any of those fellows or anything. But
ah, if I were to see one of those boys today, you know, why you'd
be a friend. And I think that is... just the way that...

SC So I think we were the same kind of folks. We like the
outdoors, we like the hard work, we like the adventure of jumping.
And we liked to be able to talk about it later. And I think
that's a lot of it with, I think that's why we had such a good
turnout last week, Because a lot of those fellows had
comraderie, or whatever they call it, you know. That has lasted
over the years, and a lot of those guys, you know, they'd never
seen each other since. But they were old buddies, slapping
backs, a lot of back slapping and all that kind of stuff last
week. I think that would probably speak very well.

SC Do you think that smokejumping, like smokejumpers you talk
about, over seventeen years and stuff, do you think it's a
profession. Do you see it as profession?

OO I think it is more professionalized today, sure. But so is
everything else.

SC And what makes it more professional?
It isn't just the idea that they are jumping for longer periods of time today. I think it's the training they get, the sense of mission, more today then... well, I can't say the sense of mission. I think it's more of a job for them today than it was in the old days. Just a job.

SC What about the training is different now, than what you went through?

First of all the equipment is all that much different. And it's being developed to a very high degree. We were using old jump chutes from the Army, left over from World War II. Of course we only had the one airplane. But today, they'll jump out of several different airplanes depends on where they're at. In all kinds of terrain, from Alaska tundra, to dry gamberlock [?] hill sides down in Arizona, New Mexico. And everything in, from tall timber to grasslands, over on the prairies almost. They need that training that took in, that all into consideration.

Plus there's a lot more regulations that we've got to... OSHA, safety regulations that we've got to comply with today that we didn't in those days, you know. I would say we had a safe organization, really but our injury rate was quite a bit higher than it is today, I'm sure of that. So, you know, the Mann Gulch Fire should have never happened to, I mean... the... the burning of the thirteen jumpers should never have happened. It wouldn't happen today under our training. I think that we have a more intense training experience. I think you can almost... compare us to the old barn stormers, you know, of a generation before. Those daredevil pilots in their beat-up old airplanes,[laughs]. I think that the smokejumpers of the 40's and the 50's were similar to those people and probably with the same kind of temperament and the same kind of ego, and the same kind of... attitude that they had. I would kind of consider that.

And jumping to us was more than just a way to get to the fire. That's what tied the people together. I fought fire with lots of other folks, and I hardly remember anything about those days. Still very vivid in my memory about what happened in 1950 when I jumped. Does anybody know where Cliff Marshall is?

SC I don't know.

Try to find out for me, where Cliff is. He was a foreman here.

SC How would you sum up that summer smokejumping?

Well, I'll never forget it. I had a lot of fun. I had some disappointments in not having more fire jumps. Ah, but that was the only disappointment. I wasn't disappointed with the country that I saw. I wasn't disappointed in the training or disappointed in myself in being able to stand up to the rigors. I think those are the things probably I remember most.

And although I got married the next year, that wasn't the only reason I didn't go back. I didn't go back because we had a war started, you know, to be fought. And I finished with my
college, I was offered a steady job and I went from there. Six months later I was in the Marine Corps. But that summer was one I'll never forget. It was one of the happiest summers in my life.

SC What do you think of about women smokejumpers?

OO I think it's kind of neat,[laughs], God, yes. When I was in the camps, whether it was a logging camp, or what it was, Forest Service camps, or fire camps or... we didn't see any ladies in the camps at all. We always had men cooks even, and all, you know, and no ladies. When we wanted to go see the ladies we went to town. So it's hard for me to get used to that, you know. But I am now. But I think it's neat.

If that's what they want to do, hey, fantastic. I think everybody should do what they want to do. And I think the gals have done a remarkably good job, from my standpoint. And I hold a Safety Chief's cargo in Region Six. Here in Region One, what I get told and from what I've seen, and I've been on a lot of fires. Those gals are putting out there share, pulling their end of it, and I don't see why they wouldn't make good smokejumpers along with the rest of them. And it's something that takes a little getting used to, for a person from my generation and my walk of life. It takes a little something getting used to after not, after being so many years without seeing ladies on the fire line, or in the camps, you know. It does take a little getting used to, you know.

But my experience as a safety chief, safety officers, safety chief, I've never seen any problems develop with them that wouldn't develop with a man. As a matter of fact, I just... probably a lower ratio of gals who come in and use the first aid facilities than men, on the job. The usual blisters, or thorns, or splinters or falls or something like that is all I've ever experienced. I used to keep track pretty close... to the first aid kit, and that which is happening on the fire, because if the ranger came. So I could never see any problem with that. Once I got used to seeing ladies out on the fire line, well then, the younger folks wouldn't have that transition to make. Matter of fact, I think it's kind of neat. How many young lady smokejumpers are there this year?

SC There's five in Missoula and there's one down in McCall and I'm not sure. Maybe eight, someone told me eight.

OO Good, good. That ain't good enough.

SC Is there anything else you'd like to put on this tape about your experience smokejumping or feelings about it or the time that you were doing it?

OO No, I think we've covered it pretty well, really. I just like the opportunity because I realize now,[laughs], I guess I'm a part of history, you know. Those of us who were in the early days of smokejumping. And I guess you've got to admit, that was the early days of smokejumping. You hate to admit it, but hell it was. I used to, I never really thought about it, til I... you
know, hell at reunion. All those old broke down smokejumpers, Christ. [laughs]. Till I got over there that I realized, hey we worked hard at history. After all there was very few of us, in those days, and I guess I feel pretty good about it.

END OF THE INTERVIEW